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## THE PEDAGOGICAL STATUS OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED SCHOOL CHILDREN<sup>1</sup>

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A recent American writer states that he has found feeble-minded children in the high schools of a large American city. Another American writer has asserted that "the morons are generally found sitting in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades." Of one hundred offenders classified by another American writer as feeble-minded, 7 per cent had reached the eighth, 9 per cent the seventh, 11 per cent the sixth, 23 per cent the fifth, and 14 per cent the fourth, grade. In other words, the majority, or 64 per cent, were registered in Grades IV to VIII. In an investigation<sup>2</sup> made a few years ago we found that pupils assigned to the special classes for mental defectives in this country were sometimes doing work in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. In 1914, 17.6 per cent of pupils registered in the special classes included in the report were doing work above the fourth grade, while 25.3 per cent were doing work in the third and fourth grades. At the same time we found that 20.9 per cent of the pupils confined in state schools for the feeble-minded throughout the country were doing work in the third and fourth grades, and 5.8 per cent in grades above the fourth.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, Tredgold, of England, an international authority on the feeble-minded, found that not a single one of the brightest pupils of an average age of twelve years enrolled in a "typical special day school under the London County Council" came up to "normal Standard II," although in "occupational and manual work" they were "decidedly better." Mrs. Hume Pinsent, the founder of the famous Birmingham After-Care Committee, states that it is "quite exceptional" for any children who are

<sup>1</sup> Presented before Section L, Education, American Association for the Advancement of Science, December, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> *Problems of Subnormality* (1917), pp. 86-94.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

retained in the special schools of Birmingham to "reach a higher educational position than that attained in Standard II. This means that at sixteen the best of them will be able to read and calculate to about the same extent as a normal child of eight or nine. The numbers who attain to Standard II are variously stated by witnesses as from 40 to 58 per cent, at best only about half of the total number." It should be borne in mind that the English special schools are expressly limited by statutory provision to the reception of "feeble-minded" children,<sup>1</sup> who must have been so certified by the examiners. Binet and Simon assert that only half of the mental defectives in France reach the first-year intermediate course, corresponding to ages nine and ten.

The foregoing facts seem to indicate that there is a wide discrepancy between American and British and French standards of the possible pedagogical attainments of feeble-minded children. In England the brightest among the mental defectives do not go beyond the second standard. In America, on the other hand, we are told that they are found as a rule in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades, and that they are sometimes found in the high schools, while we find in practice that pupils who do work from the third to the fifth or sixth grade are sent to the day classes for the "defective" or feeble-minded, and are also permanently confined in colonies for the feeble-minded. It must be conceded, of course, that it is entirely possible, in schools where the system prevails of promoting pupils automatically who have failed twice in the same grade, that the feeble-minded may get into high school, and even that imbeciles may go through both high school and college if they are sufficiently long-lived and persevere long enough, but it is highly improbable that this happens as a matter of fact. The evidence that has been offered that this does happen is quite inconclusive, for the pupils who have been called feeble-minded have been so diagnosed on the basis of the XII-year standard of the 1908 or 1911 Binet-Simon scale, or on the basis of an arbitrary quantitative standard of mental retardation. On the basis of exactly the same

<sup>1</sup> It seems quite evident that the English term "feeble-minded" is not equivalent to the American term "moron," when the latter term is applied to Binet-Simon mentalities of X to XII.

standards we found some time ago every one of a group of eminently successful adults and at least four of a group of six successful high- and normal-school students to be morons.<sup>1</sup> Since pupils who do work in the intermediate grades and sometimes even in higher grades are being assigned throughout the country to classes for mental defectives, it is well to consider whether our standards of mental deficiency have not been set too high,<sup>2</sup> for we regard it as inadvisable both on social and pedagogical grounds to assign backward children to special classes for the feeble-minded instead of to ungraded classes for the backward; and certainly backward children should not be committed as "defectives" to state colonies, as now sometimes happens.

For several years we have been gathering pedagogical data on pupils who have been attending special classes for mental defectives, and retarded pupils whom we have clinically examined.<sup>3</sup> We propose here merely to present some data bearing on the pedagogical status of children whom we have diagnosed as feeble-minded in the psycho-educational clinic of the department of instruction of the city of St. Louis. We make no pretention to infallibility in the diagnosis of these children. Because we have tried to be conservative in our diagnosis, giving the pupil the benefit of the doubt, it is probable that some of the children who have been diagnosed as border-line and very backward will eventually prove to be feeble-minded. But it is also probable that some of the cases diagnosed as high-grade feeble-minded will eventually prove by their ability to lead an independent existence, which, ultimately, is the one crucial test of feeble-mindedness, that they are border-line or backward. Before making the diagnosis, however, we made a fairly intensive study of each case, from the standpoint of the child's family and personal history, pedagogical record, and physical and mental condition. The time given to the study of each case by

<sup>1</sup> *Problems of Subnormality* (1917), pp. 221 f. See also *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, January, May, and July, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> No one had conclusively demonstrated the legitimacy of the standards at the time they were proposed; they were accepted *ex cathedra*.

<sup>3</sup> We have already partly analyzed some of the data from the St. Louis Special School pupils. See *Problems of Subnormality* (1917), pp. 87-91.

the different persons who have co-operated probably averages at least four hours.

The data bearing on the child's pedagogical status have been secured from two sources: First, from the report made by the principal and teachers (on our Form 13-A) of the elementary school in which the child was enrolled at the time he was reported to the clinic for examination. This report indicated the grade (and frequently the quarter) in which the child was registered. Secondly, from the report made by the teachers (on our Form 13-G) in the special school to which the child was assigned. The second of these reports is made to the clinic one month after the child is admitted. Thereafter a report is filed at the end of each school year. These reports are quite elaborate and contain, among other matters, a statement of the grade in which the child is able to function in the different branches of instruction offered in the special schools. This information, however, is not always supplied by the teachers, because they are unable to grade the child very accurately. Most of the teachers feel that they can grade most accurately in reading and arithmetic, and the grading is most frequently supplied in these branches. From the special schools we shall utilize only the grades in reading and arithmetic submitted at the end of the child's first year in the special school.<sup>1</sup> The estimates from the special schools will serve as a valuable check on the accuracy of the classification reported from the elementary schools. The special-school estimates, of course, indicate more nearly the child's actual pedagogical status, for two reasons: first, because the special-school teachers have had time to make a much more thorough study of the child than did the regular grade teachers; and secondly, because the pupils may have been advanced beyond their actual capacity in the elementary schools. It would be desirable to check further the grading of both the elementary- and the special-school teachers by standardized educational tests. While we have given

<sup>1</sup> It did not seem advisable to use the grades reported at the end of the child's first month in school, because the teachers were less certain of the classification at that time and the grades were less frequently reported. Frequently the grades reported at the end of the first month and at the end of the first year were identical. In most instances in which the classifications were different the later grade was higher.

such tests to some of the pupils as a part of our clinical examination, we have been unable, because of lack of time, to do the work systematically enough to justify us in using these standardized results for the purpose of this study. Judged by the results of the tests we have given, the estimates of most of the special-school teachers have a considerable degree of accuracy.<sup>1</sup>

The chief difficulty encountered in making this study was the lack of data on many cases. Out of a block of 379 consecutive feeble-minded cases we were obliged to reject 93 because the pedagogical record was not reported. This includes all the idiots, fully half of the imbeciles, and some of the higher grades. Many of the children who had to be rejected from the tabulation had never been in school. We have not used the record of anyone with a B.-S. (Binet-Simon) mentality of less than V years. It is evident that our results apply to the higher grades of the feeble-minded whom we have examined. Of the 286 cases which we have utilized, the grade was supplied from the elementary schools for 246, and from the special schools for 133 in reading and 100 in arithmetic. Eighty-two of the children were classified as imbeciles, and 204 as morons<sup>2</sup> varying in B.-S. mentalities from V to X years (Table I). Thirty

TABLE I  
DIAGNOSIS OF THE 286 SUBJECTS INCLUDED IN THE TABLES

B.-S. AGE	IMBECILES			MORONS			IMBECILES AND MORONS		
	Boys	Girls	Both	Boys	Girls	Both	Boys	Girls	Both
V.....	17	19	36	6*	.....	6	23	19	42
VI.....	18	15	33	4*	3*	7	22	18	40
VII.....	5	8	13	47*	16*	63	52	24	76
VIII.....	.....	.....	.....	47	40	87	47	40	87
IX.....	.....	.....	.....	22	8	30	22	8	30
X.....	.....	.....	.....	7	4	11	7	4	11

\* Potential morons.

<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written we have surveyed the pupils in our special schools by the following standardized tests: The Ayres and Starch spelling tests, the Gray oral-reading tests, and the "Arithmetic exercises" previously used in the Cleveland and St. Louis schools.

<sup>2</sup> The average amount of intelligence retardation, the average intelligence quotients, and distribution of intelligence quotients of one block of our feeble-minded cases may be found in *Problems of Subnormality* (1917), pp. 178-80.

had a B.-S. mentality of IX, and eleven of X. The average number of years in school for the pupils varied from 1.6 to 5.9 in each B.-S. age (see Table II). We can here present only the principal results of the investigation.<sup>1</sup>

TABLE II  
AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS IN SCHOOL\*

B.-S. AGES	BOYS		GIRLS		BOTH	
	Number	Average	Number	Average	Number	Average
V.....	15	1.6	17	1.5	32	1.6
VI.....	15	3.6	16	2.8	31	3.3
VII.....	39	4.3	14	4.1	53	4.2
VIII.....	31	5.6	25	5.4	56	5.5
IX.....	13	5.9	.....	.....	13	5.9

\* The "years in school" include the months spent in the special school up to the time the first annual report was made. In some cases the data were very accurately supplied in years and months, while in other cases they were inadequately supplied or not at all.

In the elementary schools the grade classification was as shown in Table III, the percentages being based on the 246 pupils for

TABLE III

GRADES	BOYS		GIRLS		BOTH	
	Number	Percentage*	Number	Percentage*	Number	Percentage
Kindergarten	4	2.5	4	4.4	8	3.2
I.....	78	49.6	46	51.6	124	50.4
II.....	46	29.3	20	22.4	66	26.8
III.....	15	9.5	12	13.4	27	10.9
IV.....	10	6.3	5	5.6	15	6.0
V.....	2	1.2	2	2.2	4	1.6
VI.....	1	0.6	.....	.....	1	.4
VII.....	1	0.6	.....	.....	1	.4

\* The percentages in all the tabulations are based upon the number of pupils for whom the grades were reported. No very consistent sex differences appear in the different tabulations.

whom the grades were reported: 80.4 per cent were enrolled in the kindergarten and the first two grades, 10.9 per cent were in the third grade, while only 8.4 per cent were in a grade above the third.

<sup>1</sup> We have tabulated the distribution of the pedagogical grades for the pupils classified in each B.-S. age. The writer will be glad to lend the tables to anyone who may wish to consult them. We hope to publish them in the *Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of St. Louis* for 1917 and 1918. An examination of the tables shows that a knowledge of a child's B.-S. age need not disclose anything definite with regard

This includes fifteen pupils in Grade IV, four in Grade V, and one each in Grades VI and VII. All of these twenty-one pupils had B.-S. ages from VIII to X. On the other hand, in reading in the special schools 86.4 per cent of the 133 pupils reported were doing from sub-kindergarten to second-grade work, 9.7 per cent did third-grade work, and 3.7 per cent, or five pupils, did fourth-grade work, as given in Table IV. Of the five doing fourth-grade work, one

TABLE IV

GRADES	BOYS		GIRLS		BOTH	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Kindergarten	8	9.3	4	8.3	12	9.0
I.....	55	64.7	25	52.0	80	60.0
II.....	11	12.9	12	25.0	23	17.2
III.....	7	8.2	6	12.5	13	9.7
IV.....	4	4.7	1	2.0	5	3.7

measured VIII years by the B.-S. scale, three IX, and one X. In arithmetic 88 per cent of the 100 pupils whose grade was reported from the special schools did from sub-kindergarten to second-grade work, 11 per cent did third-grade work, no one did fourth-grade work, and one who graded X by the B.-S. scale was reported as doing sixth-grade work, as shown by the tabulation given in Table V.

Among 124 pupils whose grades can be compared in the elementary and special schools, forty-seven were given the same classification, forty-five were given a lower classification, and twelve a higher classification in the special schools. Twelve were given a lower classification in one branch (reading or arithmetic) and the

to his pedagogical attainments. E.g., in special schools the VIII-year-olds (B.-S.) varied from Grade I to Grade IV in reading, and from Grade I to Grade III in arithmetic; in age IX they varied from I to IV in reading, and from II to III in arithmetic; and in age X from I to IV in reading, and from I to VI in arithmetic. That the pedagogical status and the B.-S. age do not coincide is evidently due to differences in the chronological ages of the pupils, differences in amount of schooling, differences in learning aptitude (which no doubt varies in general, but not absolutely, with the degree of intelligence), and specific pedagogical talents and defects. One child with a B.-S. age of X (8.8 by the 1911) did only first-grade work both in the elementary and in the special school.



same classification in the other branch, seven were given the same classification in one branch and a higher classification in the other, and one was given a lower classification in one branch and a higher one in the other in the special school than the grade assigned in the elementary school.

TABLE V

GRADES	BOYS		GIRLS		BOTH	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Kindergarten	7	11.4	3	7.7	10	10.0
I.....	31	50.8	24	61.5	55	55.0
II.....	14	22.9	9	23.0	23	23.0
III.....	8	13.1	3	7.6	11	11.0
VI.....	1	1.6	.....	.....	1	1.0

The foregoing figures show that the pupils were classified slightly higher in the elementary schools than in the special schools, although they had received varying amounts of additional individual instruction in the special schools. The number classified above the third grade in the elementary schools exceeded by 4.7 per cent and 7.4 per cent, respectively, the number rated as doing work above the third grade in reading and in arithmetic in the special schools. The number classified above the second grade in the elementary schools was 6 per cent higher than the number doing work above the second grade in reading, and 7.5 per cent higher than the number doing work above the second grade in arithmetic in the special schools. These differences are comparatively small in view of the claim made that the morons as a rule are found in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. Not quite one-fifth of our tabulated feeble-minded cases were classified above the second grade and only 8.4 per cent above the third grade even in the elementary schools.

Examination of the clinical records of the twenty-one pupils who were in the fourth grade or higher in the elementary schools reveals the following facts:

The pupil who was in the seventh grade had been in school ten and one-half years and at the age of sixteen was retarded mentally 5.8 years by the B.-S. scale (or 6.6 by the 1911 Vineland version). In the special schools he did sixth-grade work in arithmetic and

fourth-grade work in reading. He was subject to epileptic seizures. He had been deteriorating for some time, and was diagnosed as feeble-minded on the basis of the prognosis. The sixth-grade boy was reported for examination immediately on entering the public schools at the age of fourteen from a Catholic school where he had attended for eight years. The public school estimated that he was backward at least four or five years in his school work. He graded 5.6 years backward by the B.-S. scale (6.2 by the 1911) and presented pronounced signs of *dementia praecox*. Of the fifth-grade pupils one had received little or no schooling in Arkansas. She entered our schools at eleven, and after five and a half years in school was unable to do the work of the fifth grade. Although at the age of 16.7 she was retarded 7.3 years by the B.-S. scale, the evidence, after all, is not conclusive that she is feeble-minded. She conducts herself quite intelligently in many ways. One was retarded by the B.-S. scale 5.8 years (or 6 by the 1911) at the age of fifteen. She had been in a school which had been very negligent in reporting pupils for examination, and on entering the fifth grade in another school on a transfer card was found to be unable to do the work. One boy who had been advanced to the fifth grade was said to do only fourth-grade work. At the age of fourteen he was retarded by the B.-S. scale 4.2 years. There is some doubt about his being feeble-minded. One graded 6.1 years short by the B.-S. scale at the age of 15.9. He was a neurotic type who used to have hysterical out-breaks. His greatest capacities were in writing and music. He is expected to finish the sixth grade in music in a private conservatory next June. He does not quite present the syndrome of a feeble-minded child.

Of the fifteen pupils in the fourth grade in the elementary school, one was said to do only second-grade work. Of the ten who went to the special schools, nine did less than fourth-grade work and one did fourth-grade work only in reading. At the age of 11.8 she was retarded 3.8 years by the B.-S. scale (4.6 by the 1911), and showed signs of *predementia praecox*. She was probably dementing. One did almost fourth-grade work in arithmetic. At the age of 15.4 he was retarded by the B.-S. scale 7 years (7.6 by the 1911). He manifested psychotic trends, and might have been a case of

psychotic deterioration rather than feeble-minded, in spite of his great amount of retardation. In reading, one did first-grade work, two second-grade work, and five third-grade work. In arithmetic, three did first-grade work, one second-grade work, and five third-grade work. One who at the age of 13.3 was retarded 4.1 years by the B.-S. scale (4.9 by the 1911) was pretubercular, and may have been mentally enfeebled rather than feeble-minded. Our information respecting the three remaining cases, retarded mentally from 4.5 to 5.5 years, does not enable us to judge of the school work which they were actually able to do.

It is apparent from the foregoing analysis, therefore, that the large majority of those who were classified in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades in the elementary schools either did not actually do work beyond the second or third grade, or they presented such complications that it would be unsafe to affirm dogmatically on the basis of arbitrary intelligence ratings (B.-S.) that they were feeble-minded. In fact, we do not seem to have found any considerable number of feeble-minded school children who are able to do third grade work successfully, except possibly in one or two branches. The possible pedagogical attainments of the majority of them have varied from decidedly less than kindergarten standard to second-grade standard. The corollary from our results is that retarded pupils who have the potentiality of doing work beyond the third grade, possibly the majority who have the ability to do third-grade work, should be assigned to ungraded classes for the border-line and backward rather than to special classes for the feeble-minded whenever it is possible to organize both types of classes. We realize that our pedagogical data are not entirely satisfactory, and that the grade standards vary throughout the country, and our conclusions are offered with due reservations.